Rajya Sabha

Tuesday, the 22nd April, 2003/2 Vaisakha, 1925 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock, MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair,

MEMBER SWORN

SHRI K.CHANDRAN PILLAI (Kerala)

———

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Commencement of River Linking Project

*441 SHRI K. KALAVENKATA RAO:

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE:†

Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) by when the work on the Mega Project of linking of northern rivers with southern rivers is likely to commence;

(b) whether there are certain apprehensions on the practicability of this project In certain quaters in the country;

(c) if so, the details in this regard; and

(d) the steps taken to remove doubts in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Milestone dates for various activities relating to inter-linking of rivers deicided by Central Government are as under:—

(i) Completion of Feasibility Studies : By 31.12.2005

(ii) Completion of Detailed Project Reports : By 31.12.2006

(iii) Implementation of the Project (TO years) : By 31.12.2016

(b) to (d) The State Governments have expressed divergent views about the water balance studies and feasibility reports prepared by National

†† The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Karnendu Bhattachariee.

Water Development Agency (NWDA). Besides a few voluntary organizations and individuals have expressed their apprehensions regarding the feasibility of the inter-linking projects prepared by NWDA. A group headed by Chairman, Central Water Commission (CWC) and consisting of other officers of CWC and Secretaries of Irrigation/Water Resources Department from concerned States has been constituted in June, 2002 to discuss with the States the issues of arriving at a consensus regarding sharing of surplus waters and the preparation of detailed project report by NWDA. In addition, the Central Government has set-up a Task Force on Inter-linking of Rivers under the Chairmanship of Shri Suresh Prabhu, Member Parliament (Lok Sabha) on December 13, 2002. The Task Force has the following term of reference :—

(i) Provide guidance on norms of appraisal of individual projects in respect of economic viability, socio-economic impacts, environmental impacts and preparation of resettlement plans;

(ii) Devise suitable mechanism for bringing about speedy consensus amongst the States;

(iii) Prioritize the different project components for preparation of Detailed Project Reports and implementation;

(iv) Propose suitable organizational structure for implementing the project;

(v) Consider various modalities for projects funding; and

(vi) Consider international dimensions that may be involved in some project components.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Sir, the Task Force has been set up by the Government of India since long for working on the interlinking of rivers of the country. Many articles have appeared in the newspapers and journals, but most of the top specialists in the field have questioned the financial viability and technical feasibility of the mega project. Sir, I would like to know how is this figure of Rs. 56,000 crores arrived at and how is this huge sum proposed to be collected? The Government has so far not given any details, but I have read in the Minister's reply that different opinions have come from different State Government regarding this project.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please reply the question.The question has already been put.

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: Sir, the Task Force was appointed on December 13,2002, under the Chairmanship of Shri Suresh Prabhu, hor. Member of Lok Sabha. The cost per unit benefit in inter-linking prcposals is: irrigation — Rs. 1.20 lakhs per hectare and power— Rs. 4 cross per mega watt. On this basis, the amount has been estimated. And, so far as dissenting views expressed in newspapers and journals are concerned, I would like to inform the hon. House that yes, there have been divergent views expressed in media, as well as other forums. But, we are trying to narrow down the differences, to arrive at a consensus on this issue.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE : Sir, my second supplementary is that the project, if implemented, will lead to huge loss of forest and farm lands and other dams. The dams, which are proposed to be built to connect the Himalayan rivers with the South Indian rivers, will uproot many people from their habitation. I would like to know how the Government proposes to address this problem. In such a gigantic work, people's participation is a must. How does the Government propose to ensure people's participation in this mega task? And, finally, Sir, the National Water Commission, in its Annual Conference, held in Gujarat specifically opposed this project because in their opinion, supported by specialists, it is neither practicable nor technically feasible...

MR. CHAIRMAN : Why are you making a speech on it? Just put your supplementary.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE :The reply does mention the targets set for various years. This is nothing but a propaganda. It is not being implemented.

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: Sir, it is not a propaganda at all. In order to achieve this, so to say, gigantic as well as a mega project, as I have already stated, a Task Force has been constituted, and this is going into the details of every issue that is confronting us, especially, forest land, population, etc. As has been mentioned by the hon. Member, we are having discussions with all the States, including the groups which have divergent views. Without a consensus on this particular issue, the Government will not do anything which will affect the human population and displace the persons in different areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Shrimati Shabana Azmi... .

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN : Please tell us what the likely cost is.

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: It is Rs. 5,60,000 crores.

SHRIMATI SHABANA AZMI: Sir, intra-basin transfer of waters such as this project would also involved building of barrages and dams. Now, world over, projects like these are notorious for the amount of displacement they cause and for the environmental degradation. And, when you look at the feasibility of the project, the cost that will be incurred and the benefit that will be accrued are totally unviable. What efforts are being made to remove the apprehensions from the public mind about the project? You know, for instance, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has done a lot of work with regard to settlement of displaced persons. But it is being said that even in the case of the Narmada Dam projects, we had not been able to resettle people. Right from the time of construction of the first dam, this has been our record. What attempts are being made to involve groups which are critical rather than the groups which are only appreciative of the stance?

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: We are sparing no effort to convince the groups which are very much critical about the practicability of this project. We are trying our best, and the Government has an open mind to convince every person, as well as groups, which are very much critical. But without arriving at a consensus, the Government is not imposing anything on anybody.

श्री सतीश प्रधानः सभापति महोदय , मैं आपके माध्यम से आदरणीय मंत्री जी से सिर्फ इतना जानना चाहता हूं कि ये जो इंटरलिंकिंग ऑफ रिवर्ज़ प्रोजैक्ट्स हैं, ऐसी चर्चा है कि इनके पूरा होने के बाद महाराष्ट्र के मराठावाड़ा और विदर्भ का जो एरिया है, उसको कुछ फायदा नहीं मिलने वाला है, तो क्या आप इस विषय पर कुछ जानकारी दे सकेंगे?

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI : Sir, the hon. Member is very apprehensive that the areas of Marathwada and Vidharba would not get any benefit. It is not true. Certainly, every part of the country will be benefited, because of transfer of water from surplus regions to deficit regions.

श्री गया सिंहः माननीय मंत्री, जी, आप का उद्देश्य उत्तर भारत को दक्षिण को दक्षिण भारत की नदियों से मिलाने का है, लेकिन मैं आप से सिर्फ यह जानना चाहता हूं कि नेपाल से तो उत्तर भारत में हर साल फल्ड आती है, उस के पानी के लिए भी क्या आप कोई इंतजाम करेंगे ताकि वह दक्षिण चला जाए ?

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI :The very purpose of this particular mega project is to transfer surplus water from surplus regions to deficit regions of the country.